



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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1. Iowans create water quality successes in 2008

IOWANS CREATE WATER QUALITY SUCCESSES IN 2008

MEDIA CONTACT: Steve Hopkins, DNR Watershed Improvement, at (515) 281-6402 or Stephen.Hopkins@dnr.iowa.gov

DES MOINES — The efforts of Iowans in 2008 to improve Iowa's lakes, rivers and streams have resulted in success stories across the state, and more efforts are underway for 2009. Working with groups statewide, including the Iowa DNR's Watershed Improvement Program, Iowans are making changes on the land to improve our waters.

"Local efforts are critical to improving our state's water quality, and because of Iowans' work, we're seeing changes," said DNR Director Richard Leopold. "The successes go beyond improving data results to creating cleaner drinking water and better water for swimming, fishing and boating. That can translate into increased tourism and dollars for Iowa communities."

The DNR works with other state and federal agencies to help Iowans organize local watershed improvement efforts, providing technical and financial assistance. The DNR helps groups create long-term, comprehensive plans for making changes in their water. With watershed management plans, local groups can target their efforts in the areas that need the most help and can make the largest impact on water quality. Working with landowners, homeowners and volunteers, local watershed efforts help landowners use conservation practices – farming and land management practices that help keep soil on the land and pollutants out of our water.

“River, stream and lake basins don’t follow fence lines,” said Leopold. “So Iowans are coming together, working with their next-door neighbors, communities and surrounding counties to make changes in their water.”

For example, at Lake of Three Fires in southwest Iowa, a watershed project paved the way for a restoration project that’s given new life to the lake. Once called “Lake of Three Fish” by anglers, the lake now boasts the most catchable fish it has had in 30 years.

Landowners working with the local watershed project made changes to their fields, holding back soil and filtering nutrients before they could reach the lake. Once work in the watershed was in place to protect the lake, the DNR moved forward with in-lake restoration efforts, including dredging roughly 490,000 cubic yards of sediment from the lake. That’s enough soil to fill a 170-mile-long line of dump trucks from Des Moines to Davenport.

“The angler count at Three Fires was so bad that we didn’t even used to count the numbers,” said Gary Sobotka, DNR fisheries biologist. “I would say we’ve had about three to four times more fishing and lake visitors than we used to have.”

Success stories from 2008, including Lake of Three Fires, are highlighted in “Working for Clean Water: 2008 Watershed Improvement Successes in Iowa,” a booklet available on the DNR’s Web site at www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/.

Work is already underway to create the next round of success stories. The DNR is currently accepting applications for “319” watershed improvement grant funding through April 1. The term “319” refers to Section 319 of the federal Clean Water Act, which allows the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to provide the DNR funding for nonpoint pollution programs.

“We’re excited that we can continue to help Iowans get out there and improve the lakes, rivers and streams in their own backyards,” said Steve Hopkins of the DNR’s Watershed Improvement Program. “And we’re currently accepting applications to provide grant funding to more local watershed groups.”

While the Watershed Improvement Program heads up these watershed projects for the DNR, watershed projects are a collaborative effort with many DNR programs, such as fisheries, wildlife and forestry. The DNR also works with a number of partners, such as the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Iowa soil and water conservation districts.

For more information on the DNR’s watershed improvement efforts or on grant applications, contact Steve Hopkins at (515) 281-6402 or at Stephen.Hopkins@dnr.iowa.gov or visit www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/.

Writer: Jessie Brown

